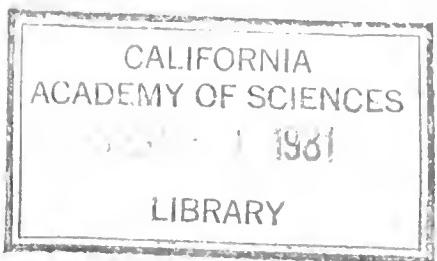


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# the GULL

Volume 63      Berkeley, Calif.      September 1981      Number 8

## Films and Condor Update for September

Two extraordinarily beautiful and thought-provoking National Audubon Society films will be shown at our September general meeting and Jerry Emory, GGAS' former Executive Secretary will bring us up to date on the status of the California Condor captive breeding program. The award-winning film, "Time for Survival," is about protection of endangered species, changes in the environment and how both man and wildlife must adjust to them. "Last Stronghold of the Eagles" shows the great annual gathering of Bald Eagles in Alaska's Chilkat River Valley and discusses the danger to them if this area is allowed to be logged.

The meeting will be at the Northbrae Community Church, 941 The Alameda, Berkeley, on Thursday, September 18, at 7:30 p.m.

Our first annual potluck dinner on June 19 was a rousing success even though the weather was hot enough to melt your eyebrows. About one hundred and twenty-five members attended and the food they brought was gourmet fare. Hospitality Chair Hazel Houston sends special thanks to the musicians; Pete Allen, Dick Oxtot, Ray Skelbred and P. T. Stanton, as well as to those who helped in the kitchen and with setting up; Delpha deTimofeev, Helen Chisim, Danne Jones, Jane and John Felker, Jerry Emory and Paul Green.

Will anyone volunteer to help serve refreshments at the general meeting in the East Bay? Please call Hazel Houston at 635-7347.

—PROGRAM COMMITTEE

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## Field Trips Calendar

**Wednesday, September 9—Alameda shore line.** Meet at 8 a.m. at the intersection of Broadway and Shoreline to look for shorebirds. Lunch optional. Leaders: Delpha deTimofeev and Ruth Voss (525-8032).

**Saturday, September 12—Coastal San Francisco.** Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the parking lot between South and Middle Lakes (Chain of Lakes) near the 41st Ave. and Lincoln Way entrance to Golden Gate Park. We will bird in the park, Lake Merced and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in search of early migrants in the City. We should also see many of the birds commonly found in the area. Bring your lunch and be prepared for cold weather near the coast. Leader: Dan Murphy (564-0074).

**Saturday, September 19—Point Reyes.** Meet at 8 a.m. at the Larkspur Ferry Terminal parking lot (section H). From Hwy. 101 exit at Sir Francis Drake Blvd. and drive east to the terminal. From the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge drive toward San Francisco and turn left into the parking lot just before reaching Hwy. 101. We will carpool and caravan from there. Bring lunch and liquids. It may be foggy and cold near the coast so dress appropriately. We will look for vagrant birds in the islands of trees near the coast. Leader: Mary Louise Rosegay (368-1640). (✓)

**Saturday/Sunday, September 19/20—Yosemite National Park.** Saturday meet at 8 a.m. at Bridalveil Campground. Sunday meet at 8 a.m. at the Chevron Station at Crane Flat. Bring lunch and liquids. Be prepared for any kind of weather. Leader: John Zablackis (642-2072, work; 527-2083, home). (✓)

**Saturday, September 26—Point Diablo.** Meet at the top of Bunker Hill where we will watch for migrating hawks and land birds between 10 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. From San Francisco drive north across the Golden Gate Bridge and take Alexander Ave. exit. Turn left as if to return to San Francisco, drive under the freeway and bear to the right. Go up the road to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, continue along the road past the intersection with a road coming up from Rodeo Valley to the large tunnels on the right. Park and walk up the trail to the left of the second tunnel. We will bird from the observation point at the north end of the hilltop. If it's too foggy we'll bird in nearby locations for vagrants and waterbirds. Bring lunch, liquids and spotting scopes.

Sun screen, a hat and a wind breaker may be advisable. Leader: Tony Briggs (282-3142) or ask for Tony by name at 626-3131, an answering service. (✓)

**Sunday, September 27—Alameda and San Leandro Bay Shoreline.** Meet at **9:30 a.m.** in Alameda at Broadway and Shoreline Dr. We will bird the Elsie B. Roemer Bird Sanctuary and the San Leandro Bay Regional Shoreline. Bring lunch and liquids. Shorebirds should be present in numbers so bring a spotting scope. We should also see some land birds. Leader: Leora Feeney (522-8525).

**Saturday, October 3—Lands End, San Francisco.** Meet at **8 a.m.** at the Palace of the Legion of Honor parking lot (Lincoln Park). From Geary St. go north (toward the bay) on 34th Ave. to the top of the hill (through the golf course) and park in the large circular lot to the east (right). Lunch optional. We'll walk about two miles. Leaders: Donna Lion and Alan Hopkins (585-5669).

**Saturday, October 3—Beginners' trip to Briones Park —** This trip is designed especially for beginning birders. We will concentrate on field identification of common birds. Bring binoculars if you can. Lunch is optional. Meet at **9 a.m.** at the parking lot past the Bear Valley entrance station.

From Hwy. 26, take the Orinda exit to Camino Pablo and continue north for about two miles to Bear Creek Rd. (there is a sign to Briones Regional Park). Turn right and drive four miles east to the park entrance. Leader, Gene Hull (525-6893).

**Sunday, October 4—Point Reyes.** Meet at **7 a.m.** in the parking lot by the market in Inverness. From there we will caravan to various points on the Point Reyes peninsula. Bring lunch and liquids. (The Inverness market won't be open at 7 a.m.). We may see Pectoral Sandpiper, vagrant warblers and longspurs. Leader: Chris Carpenter (376-6802).

**Carpooling arrangements** can be made for trips marked (✓). Call Kate Partridge at 236-9853 and leave a message. She will contact you.

**Problems:** If for any reason you have difficulty getting in touch with a field trip leader or need information regarding a trip, call Shirley Kelly (387-8290), or the GGAS office (843-2222).

—FIELD TRIPS COMMITTEE

## June and July Observations - through July 28

June's weather spoiled the eastern vagrant season, but as always the summer produced a fair share of other rarities. As the seabirds began to fledge on Southeast Farallon their breeding season appeared to be good but not great (PRBO). A veteran team of birders (DR, LCB, BDP, JP) set new national Big Day records for both June (178 species) and July (170) within Monterey County. Assuming they can break 167 in August the sweep will be complete: the national Big Day records for all 12 months will belong to California and all but April to Central California!

### WORTHY WATERBIRDS

A Red-necked Grebe was by Doran Park, Bodega Bay, July 5 (BDP, *et al.*). Two adult Little Blue Herons attended the Alviso egret/heron colony, but nesting has yet to be confirmed this year. One appeared by April 28. Meanwhile, the colony had a banner year, with 740 pairs of Snowy Egrets and 540 pairs of Black-crowned Night Herons censused (all RL, MR, *et al.*). An adult Little Blue Heron was seen July 11 at its usual haunt, Charleston Slough, Palo Alto (KH), and is probably an Alviso bird. Summering Blue-winged Teals were found on the small pond north of Drakes Beach (two on June 6 - DS, MAS), at Moffett Field (four on June 9 - MR, *fide* RL), and at Alviso (one on July 9 - MR *fide* RL). The large pond northeast of Drakes Beach had a Ring-necked Duck July 20 (DS), a good find in summer. At Moss Landing the female Oldsquaw remained through at least July 11 (RY, SG). Another Oldsquaw was by the mouth of Tomales Bay June 28 (DS) and a third frequented the Bay Bridge Toll Plaza beach July 7-25 (AG, WG, GH) before moving to the Emeryville Marina July 28 (AG, WG). More usual were the two Harlequin Ducks at Año Nuevo July 25 (GGAS).

Juvenal Semipalmated Sandpipers at Palo Alto and the mouth of Pescadero Creek were found on the same day (July 25) by the same observer (TB). Both birds were seen the following day (respectively: JG; AH, KH, DL). July 10-11 produced SE Farallon's earliest Baird's Sandpiper (PRBO), surprisingly the only one to arrive before an early Pectoral Sandpiper July 25-26 at Año Nuevo (DJ, JZ, MW, GGAS). On the same Año Nuevo beach July 25 was a male **Ruff** so early that it still carried traces of an orange ruff (MW, JZ, DJ, GGAS). A real surprise was the Pomarine Jaeger flying south over the Bay past Alameda Naval

Air Station July 13 (SFB), very early and not the jaeger species expected inside the Bay. Two South Polar Skuas outside Monterey Bay July 25 (DLS, *et al.*) may represent regular occurrence at this season. Similarly, only more long summer boat trips will clarify the status of Sabine's Gulls such as the one seen July 25 (DLS, *et al.*). Careful records of their plumages should help distinguish early migrants from non-breeders summering off our coast. At Moss Landing, the strange plumage of a one-year-old Mew Gull puzzled observers June 19, but was subsequently deciphered (DR, *et al.*). Was the Common Tern on a small pond north of Drakes Beach June 6 (DS, MAS) a late spring migrant? Increasing counts of Common Terns at Moss Landing in late June seemed to indicate arrival: two on June 27 (BDP, JP), four on June 28 (KHa), ten on June 29 (JM, AG, WG). Four Least Terns roosting on Doran Spit, Bodega Bay, July 4 (LCB), with one there the next day (BDP, *et al.*), constitute the first Sonoma County record; there are very few from farther north.

**Black Skimmers** created excitement by approximately equalling all previous sightings. This began with two at Pajaro Dunes and Moss Landing June 15-17 (JW, BR, DEk). From June 18 only one was seen intermittently at Moss Landing, usually in the evening but also early (DR, BW, JM, AG, WG, MS, SG, *et al.*), through at least July 26 (*fide* DE). Apparently they roosted with terns on the Elkhorn Slough salt ponds. A single **Black Skimmer** roosting on Doran Spit, Bodega Bay, July 3 (RS, *et al.*) was last seen flying northwest over the harbor the same day (HG, *et al.*). Skimmers were unusually widespread along the Southern California coast this season. Nevertheless, the bird of the season was our **breeding plumaged male Least Auklet**, the first ever southeast of Kodiak Island, Alaska! This tiny alcid was picked up sick and very thin on Thornton State Beach in Daly City June 15 and was delivered to the Peninsula Humane Society, where it died overnight (*fide* BG, SS). Undoubtedly many rare birds found dying have never been reported to scientists, but in this case someone (BG) realized that your Observations Editor should be informed. Thus I was able to confirm the identification and secure the specimen for preservation and study in the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology. Perhaps this early summer occurrence is related to the presence of Horned Puffins in California waters during recent Mays and Junes. Tufted Puffins were widely reported. At presumed nesting sites, two were at Pt. Reyes June 4-7 (SL, *et al.*), one at Chimney Rock June 7 (HL), and about 20 at Fish Rocks, southern Mendocino County, June 13 (JP, BDP). Two Tufted Puffins were outside Monterey Bay July 25 (DLS, *et al.*), but the real surprise was one in breeding plumage clearly sketched at Crab Cove, Alameda, July 9 (IB).

## FARALLON RARITIES

Several birds very rare or unseasonal on Southeast Farallon Island appeared there (all PRBO): Green Heron July 8, Sora July 3, Marbled Godwit June 28 (earliest Island arrival), three Caspian Terns July 4 and Song Sparrow June 26.

## MOSTLY INTERIOR LANDBIRDS

A Yellow-billed Cuckoo northeast of Drakes Beach stayed surprisingly long; found July 20 (DS), it was resighted July 28 (TC). A Common Nighthawk was well heard calling in flight over Codornices Canyon, Berkeley, 10-11 p.m. July 15 (BU, AC). Swifts are often identification problems, but imagine the albino reported from Wildcat Beach, Pt. Reyes, July 11 (GM). An apparent Chimney Swift foraging low at the Palace of Fine Arts, San Francisco, July 18, was initially thought a Black Swift, despite its passing within a few feet of the observer (BH). Besides the well-known sites occupied by Black Swifts this summer, Año Nuevo and Lighthouse Pt., Santa Cruz (SG), add Anderson Canyon on the Big Sur coast June 27 (DR, *et al.*). Nearby, at the mouth of Bixby Canyon, both male and female Costa's Hummingbirds were seen during June (DR, *et al.*). Apparently absent from the north end of Mines Road, Livermore, for several years, a probable family group of four Cassin's Kingbirds July 18 was very welcome (AE). Both species of magpies were reported only a week and about five miles apart on the Sonoma County coast; perhaps one observer erred. These reports were "Black-billed" at the Bodega Marine Lab May 22-23 (KS, *et al.*, *fide* BDP) and "Yellow-billed" at Wright's Beach May 31 (SC *fide* BDP *fide* DS).

A scattering of irruptive Red-breasted Nuthatches appeared at coastal vagrant traps: Fish Docks June 2 (KC), Pt. Reyes July 3 (AG, WG), SE Farallon July 5 (PRBO), and two Bodega Bay spots, July 5 (BDP, *et al.*) and July 6 (NC). With the July 5 nuthatch was a very unseasonal **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** (BDP, *et al.*). This might be taken as circumstantial evidence of a montane origin of the nuthatches; will fall support this idea? On June 14 Sea Ranch had two species scarce on the coast, Yellow-headed Blackbird and Lawrence's Goldfinch (JP, BDP). The pair of **Great-tailed Grackles** became more conspicuous in San Francisco Aquatic Park for several months before July 2 when they were discovered nesting slightly east of last year's failed nest (SGI, GLU). At this writing the outcome is unknown.

## FARALLON VAGRANTS

The late May vagrants on our coast (table in last *Gull*) were mirrored on SE Farallon (all reports by PRBO). After a male Indigo Bunting May 26, a miniature wave on May 28 brought a **Veery**, **Worm-eating Warbler**, two Ovenbirds and a Brewer's Sparrow. Very few Veery reports have been accepted by the California Records Committee. The two Ovenbirds remained to the next day, when a female Northern Parula was banded. Four warblers dropped in June 1: male Northern Parula, Palm Warbler, male Hooded Warbler and young male American Redstart. The Palm Warbler was banded and seen intermittently through July 15.

The next few days were choked by dense coastal fog and the only vagrant was a Red-eyed Vireo on June 8. Thereafter virtually the entire vagrant season was stifled by the record-setting hot spell. Only a Yellow-breasted Chat of the eastern race strayed to SE Farallon during this endless clear weather. Finally a Swamp Sparrow June 24-27, a Chestnut-sided Warbler June 25, a Magnolia Warbler June 30-July 1 and a Tennessee Warbler July 3-5 broke the drought as coastal clouds returned. Also mentioned was an unidentified bunting seen June 29 and described as a "probable Varied Bunting" (!).

## MAINLAND VAGRANTS

Three coastal vagrants were found June 2. An Eastern Kingbird at Bodega Marine Lab (KS *fide* BDP) was typically a one-day visitor. The singing male Rose-breasted Grosbeak at Pioneer Log Cabin, Golden Gate Park, stayed overnight (NB), and the singing male Magnolia Warbler at Fish Docks (KC) was still there June 4 (HG). During the heat wave the coast was virtually devoid of landbirds. A Palm Warbler [banded?] did visit Fish Docks June 17 (JE). The Bird Observatory banded a second-year male Indigo Bunting at Palomarin June 14 (PRBO) and the one previously reported along the Fort Ross Road was singing on territory through at least June 19 (DEl, *et al.*). In Tilden Park, a male Hooded Warbler was singing June 15 along Wildcat Creek where one spent much of last summer (GH). This year's (the same individual?) was never refound, however. An Ovenbird in Monterey June 19 (CB, RB, *et al.*) completes the picture of the few vagrants avoiding the outer coast and finding more attractive places a few miles inland. If male and female find each other in an acceptable site they may breed here, as has been done two or three times by Northern Parula. It is perhaps through long-distance vagrancy and not simple range expansion

that a breeding population of American Redstarts has apparently become established in the extensive riparian vegetation of the Klamath River Mouth. Up to nine singing males and several females were found during June (GL).

After clouds reformed on the coast, vagrant American Redstarts stopped at Fish Docks July 1 (DS) and Drakes Beach July 3 (AG, WG). Also on July 3 there was a female Indigo Bunting at Bodega Bay (RS). Perhaps the last spring vagrant was the Eastern Kingbird at Olema Marsh July 10 (BB), because the Brown Thrasher at a feeder in Carmel since July 24 (DR, *et al.*) is not yet classifiable.

**Observers:** Stephen F. Bailey, Dr. C. Bates, Laurence C. Binford, Neil Blank, Ira Bletz, Bill Bowsman, Ron Branson, Tony Briggs, Arthur Campbell (AC), Kurt Campbell, Scott Carey, Tom Castro, Nancy Conzett, Afton Crooks, Art Edwards, David Ekdahl (DEk), Doug Ellis (DEl), Dick Erickson (DE), Jules Evens, Steve Getty (SG), Al Ghiorso, Wilma Ghiorso, Sue Glazer (SGl), Bob Graf, Helen Green, Jeff Greenhouse, Kem Hainebach (KH), Keith Hansen (KHa), Lola Harris, Bob Hirt, Alan Hopkins, George Hugenberg, Dick Johnson, Gary Lester (GL), Donna Lion, Helmut Loring, Roy Lowe, Gerald Luckham (GLu), John Luther, Susanne Luther, George Martin, Tom Morell, Joe Morlan, Point Reyes Bird Observatory (Farallon reports thanks to Joe Morlan and Craig Strong), Benjamin D. Parmeter, John Parmeter, Bob Ramer, Elsie Richey, Mike Rigney, Don Roberson, Debra Love Shearwater, Dave Shuford, Kimberly Smith, Golden Gate Audubon Society, Marin Audubon Society, Sandi Stadler, Rich Stallcup, Maury Stern, Bertha Underhill, Bruce Walker, John Warriner, Derek Watson, Mike Wihler, David Yee, Russell Young, Bob Yutzy, Jon Zablackis.

—STEPHEN F. BAILEY, *Observations Editor*

Museum of Vertebrate Zoology  
University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720  
(phone 548-9507; or Karen L. Bailey at 642-3327 8 a.m.-noon, 1-5 p.m.)

## CLASSES ON MARINE MAMMALS

College of Alameda is offering a unique course, "Marine Mammals of California," during the fall quarter, September 16-December 9. Excursions to areas near the Bay Area to observe marine mammals will include a free all-day boat trip in Monterey Bay to observe dolphins, porpoises and California Gray Whales. Lectures will be held on Wednesday evenings from 7-10 p.m.

For more information contact Tom Southworth at 522-7221, ext. 297.

## Conservation Notes

### CONDOR PERMIT GRANTED

On August 7 the California Fish and Game Commission granted a permit allowing the capture of up to nine California Condors — three for captive breeding and a possible total of six for a year-long radio-telemetry study. The Commission, at the recommendation of the Department of Fish and Game (DFG), stipulated that after one year of activities in the field the program is to be evaluated and any further handling of condors will be assessed at that time. Additionally, entrance into active nests was prohibited.

The permit was scheduled to be voted on in Los Angeles on July 28. After nine hours of testimony and debate, however, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) stated that they would revoke all funding for the condor recovery program if they did not get approval to capture 15 condors the first year — six for radiotelemetry and nine for captive breeding. Approval was also sought to enter active nests and inactive nests after a one-year period.

DFG's Director, Charles Fullerton, stated that 15 birds were too many and both the DFG and USFWS were ordered back to the negotiating table by Commissioner Venrick, who called USFWS's threat "blackmail." The DFG's recommended program, which stressed a cautious approach, came about through conferences with the California State Condor Advisory Committee and because of last year's death of the condor chick.

—JERRY EMORY *for the Condor Subcommittee*

### MONO LAKE DISASTER

Starvation evidently killed 97% of the California Gull chicks at Mono Lake this summer. The probable cause is that brine shrimp, the gulls' main food source, were not able to reproduce normally due to the increase in the lake's salinity.

Even if you've already contributed to the GGAS year-long effort to save Mono Lake and the gulls, now is the time to redouble your efforts. Send contributions to support the lawsuit against the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power to the GGAS office (please mark them for Mono Lake), or help sell tickets for the November Mono Lake benefit drawing. Tickets, at a recommended donation of \$1 each, are available from the GGAS office or by calling (evenings) Nicki Spillaine, 524-5102, Afton Crooks, 848-7513, or Helen Green, 526-5943.

—AFTON CROOKS, *Mono Lake Subcommittee*

## LEAST TERN NESTING SUCCESS

The Alameda Naval Air Station once again hosted the largest California Least Tern breeding colony in northern California. Laura Collins, with the aid and counsel of Stephen Bailey, studied and managed the colony for a second consecutive season, thanks to support from GGAS, the Navy and the Department of Fish and Game.

Of the 82 nests recorded at the colony at this season, it appears that only five or six failed to hatch any young.

Chick mortality was much lower this year than in 1980. The new fence around the colony site kept the tern chicks from wandering into trafficked areas. The fence may also have excluded cats, that might prey upon the colony. This year the number of chick deaths attributed to hypothermia was considerably lower, and American Kestrel predation was also reduced. As opposed to nine chicks fledged in 1980, over 100 chicks fledged successfully this year!

The causes of fledgling mortality appear to be American Kestrel predation and, occasionally, air traffic. The adults and fledglings gradually dispersed from the site until July 21st, when the site was deserted. At this writing, post-fledging roosts and foraging sites have not been discovered.

An estimate of the reproductive success of the colony will be made once all post-fledging observations are complete. However, reproductive success was certainly the highest it has been since at least 1978.

—LAURA COLLINS

(*Editor's note:* It has come to my attention that in both the June and the July-August Gulls the birds discussed above were identified as "Least Turns." Strange turns of events such as this are what make editors turn old before their time.)

## OF PASSING FRIENDS AND MARSHES

The passing in July of Fred Garretson of the *Oakland Tribune* removed from our scene a dedicated and able friend of conservation and the environment. "Skip" Garretson's reports in the early 60's awakened the public to the erosion of our bay shores and marshes and mustered support to save them. He also wrote effectively on threats to the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. As an expert writer on seismic events he more recently covered the Mt. St. Helens eruptions. It is hard indeed to accept the loss at age 47 of such a friend of our land. We heartily support the suggestion that some new marsh or shoreline of the Bay be named for Fred Garretson.

Nature continues to mock and thwart the engineers, hydrologists and other experts who manage recreational lakes, beaches — even commercial harbors. So this year finds still another study of the alga and widgeon grass problems of Lake Merritt costing nearly \$100,000. Probable recommendation — dredge it deeply and completely at a cost of one million dollars. The birds don't seem to mind the present condition; Snowy Egrets from the duck islands' colony tiptoed over the muck and fished through it.

At Alameda South Shore, where tides and winds have demolished a once-popular beach, the City Council seeks permits to deposit up to 200,000 cubic yards of new sand. Meanwhile, the marsh at the Elsie B. Roemer Sanctuary grows and prospers.

Another "little marsh worth saving" belongs to the city of San Leandro; it may be reached by a short walk from the west end of Lewelling Street. That this small salt marsh survives, diked off from tidal action, is remarkable. It was much larger, until the City Council, with approval of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, used it to deposit spoils from San Leandro Marina dredging. These could have been taken to deep waters off Alcatraz, but that would have cost more money.

"Bay Watchers" of the Ohlone Audubon Society have challenged the city of San Leandro over the issue of these illegal fills and the continued cutoff of tidal access to this surviving marsh. The Department of Fish and Game and the State Lands Commission have taken critical positions against the city's actions. The GGAS Conservation Committee will do everything in its power to support Ohlone on this issue.

—PAUL COVEL, *South Bay Regional Committee*

## A Mono Lake Guidebook

Have you ever wondered how tufa towers are formed? Why Mono Lake is salty? Who hatched chickens in Paoha Island's steam vents? How to prepare brine fly soup? You'll find these answers and many more in *The Mono Lake Guidebook*, written by David Gaines and the Mono Lake Committee.

The guidebook is the first authoritative biography of America's most extraordinary lake. From tufa to volcanoes, brine shrimp and gulls, aqueducts to water conservation, it delves into Mono's geology, wildlife and history and the alternatives to its destruction.

Order now; \$4.95 per copy (plus \$1 postage; California residents add 24¢ sales tax) from the Mono Lake Committee, P.O. Box 29, Lee Vining, CA 93541.

## GGAS-sponsored Classes for Fall

### ALBANY

**Dr. Stephen F. Bailey**, *Gull* Observations Editor, will repeat his most popular class for Albany Adult School, **Raptors**. An extra evening class has been added to provide improved instruction in identification of California species of hawks and related birds of prey. National history discussions will emphasize migration. Evening sessions will meet 7-9 p.m. on five consecutive Tuesdays from September 15 through October 13. We will observe migrating raptors on two Saturday field trips to the Point Diablo hawk lookout.

Dr. Bailey's new class will cover our many migrant and wintering **Salt Water Swimmers**, ducks, loons, grebes, cormorants, alcids, and others. It begins October 27. Details will follow in the October *Gull*.

To register call the school at 526-6811. For more information call Steve at 548-9507.

### SAN FRANCISCO

This fall GGAS is again sponsoring free evening field ornithology classes, taught by Joe Morlan, in conjunction with the Galileo-Marina Community College Center in San Francisco. Each class consists of a weekly two and one-half hour slide lecture. All evening classes are free and last 18 weeks. No pre-registration is necessary — enroll by going directly to the classroom, room 254, Marina Middle School, on the day and hour indicated below. The school is at the corner of Fillmore and Bay streets. There is convenient free parking in the school lot off Bay Street just east of the school.

**Beginning Field Ornithology** is designed for those with no previous birding experience. It serves as an introduction to the biology and identification of the common Bay Area birds. Meets Tuesdays starting September 15 from 7-9:30 p.m.

**Intermediate Field Ornithology** is for those who already know most of the common species but who wish to sharpen their birding skills. It systematically treats water birds. This season the course will start with storks and will include shorebirds and gulls. Meets Wednesdays starting September 9 from 7-9:30 p.m.

**Advanced Field Ornithology** is a continuation of Intermediate for those who want to develop a high level of competence in field identification. It systematically treats land birds. This season the course will start with thrashers and will include warblers and sparrows. Meets Thursdays starting September 10 from 7-9:30 p.m.

All class participants are invited to attend a series of optional field trips arranged on weekends to observe wild birds in natural habitats. Each class has its own series of trips. The cost of each series is \$30 per person. Details will be announced in class. Please bring binoculars and field guides to class if you have them. For further information call the college at 931-3595.

## Backyard Birders' Question Box

A pair of Brewer's Blackbirds created havoc on my lawn this summer. They dug holes and ripped up the grass. What were they after?

Brewer's Blackbirds feed on vegetable matter, usually seeds, and animal matter, chiefly insects. Many of the insects eaten are pests that plague agricultural areas, so the birds are generally welcome when they visit fields and orchards.

While these birds are very common in the Bay area, they are not ordinarily seen in urban back yards. Their presence on lawns is a warning that sod webworms have made tunnels under the grass. The blackbirds dig out these large, wormlike larvae and carry them off as food for their nestlings. It is fairly easy to fill in the holes made by the birds with a little fresh grass seed and a handful of soil. Otherwise, if the birds are chased away, the lawn owner may soon find ugly brown patches caused by the webworms.

As in this case, Brewer's Blackbirds are nearly always seen in pairs. The bright, metallic black body and the golden eye of the male, in contrast with the grayish brown plumage and brown eye of the female, make it easy to identify a pair. Once the pair is formed, the partners are seldom separated. Even when in flocks, pairs may be detected within the group, walking and foraging together, each pair slightly apart from the others. When the flock alights on wires, there is much moving about and resettling until the pairs have found one another.

While feeding in a group, the male Brewer's constantly guards his mate and warns off any other blackbird who walks between them or who tries to "muscle in" on their food supply. This is done by either a ruff-out or a bill-pointing display. A person passing by such a group needs only to stand quietly for a few minutes to observe at close range one or both of these threat displays.

In the ruff-out, the feathers of the head and neck are ruffled, the wings are slightly spread, and the tail is depressed. A sharp, high note is sounded and the display, lasting only a second or two, ends. Bill-pointing

lasts longer. The bill is held almost vertically and the body is stretched upward, giving the bird a long, slim appearance. In either case, the threat itself seems enough to cause the offender to move away.

This summer, several people who were watching swallows in the early evening over Spreckels Lake in Golden Gate Park observed that a dozen or so Brewer's Blackbirds were also out over the middle of the lake. The blackbirds fluttered their wings rapidly as they hovered over the water. Their legs dangled and their feet almost touched the surface as they dipped their bills quickly into the water. A little patient sleuthing disclosed that the birds were snatching midges emerging from the immature stage. The edges of the lake were awash with the transparent empty casts of thousands of midges. It seemed to the observers that the birds were making a tremendous expenditure of energy for a small amount of food until it was seen that birds leaving the lake with mouths full of midges were headed for the Monterey pines in the area where hungry young ones waited. This behavior continued every evening for over a week until the supply of newly metamorphosed midges diminished.

If you would like to share information on bird behavior that you have observed, or if you have a question about the birds that are commonly found in our area, write to or call Kay Steinberg, 850-38th Ave., San Francisco, CA 94121, (751-4293).

## ACR CLASSES THIS FALL

Audubon Canyon Ranch will hold weekend seminars for adults and families this fall, beginning September 20. Courses include everything from an equinox hike along the Bolinas Ridge to sessions involving illustration of biological subjects and a course dealing with migrant and wintering birds. All participants will stay for the weekend in the beautiful, secluded Volunteer Canyon, with use of the Hubbard Education Center Friday night through Sunday. For full information write Volunteer Canyon, 4800 Hwy. 1, Stinson Beach, CA 94970, or call (415) 868-0611.

## BIRDERS' PROGRAMS WITH PRBO

Point Reyes Bird Observatory will sponsor three programs of special interest to birders this fall. Led by Bob Yutzy, PRBO Education Director, they are: *Saturday Morning at the Palomarin Banding Station*, 8-10:30 a.m. each Saturday, *A Fall Migration Experience*, September 19-20, and *Vagrants, where to look for them and how to identify them*, September 27 and October 4. Write PRBO, 4990 Shoreline Hwy., Stinson Beach, CA 94970, or call (415) 868-1221 for full details.

Don't forget the PRBO — Mono Lake Birdathon on September 26. It's fun birding to raise funds for these two worthy causes and *you* could win valuable prizes. Details at the address above.

## GIFTS AND BEQUESTS

### **For GGAS**

#### **In memory of**

Dr. Eric Reynolds

**Gift of**  
Josephine J. Hughes  
Gertrude Bialos  
Betty Olds  
Gertrude Machlis

#### **In memory of**

Hermine H. Van Gelder

Dr. and Mrs. Jefferson Larkey  
Sylvia McLaughlin  
Eleanor Allison and  
daughters: Gwyneth, Anna,  
Natalie, Amanda

#### **In memory of**

Herman Blau

Aileen Pierson  
Dorothy W. Coblenz  
Garnetta Veitch

Kan and Jan Craik

#### **In memory of**

Jean Lindsay Rand

Mr. and Mrs. W. B. Beatty

#### **In memory of**

Ruth Arnold

George Homem

#### **In memory of**

Robert Cristofani

Karl and Beverly Treffinger

### **For Audubon Canyon Ranch**

**Gift of**

#### **In memory of**

Jean Simonds

Fairmont Elementary School P.T.A.

#### **In memory of**

Dr. Eric Reynolds

Dorcas and Cope MacClintock

### **For Mono Lake**

#### **In memory of**

Dr. Eric Reynolds

Mr. and Mrs. Travis Bogard

### **For the California Condor**

Eric Caine

Memorial and honorary gifts and bequests will be used as specified by the donors. Acknowledgments will be made in *The Gull* and personally by the Corresponding Secretary, Minnie Groshong. Please send checks made out to the Golden Gate Audubon Society to: Corresponding Secretary, GGAS, 2718 Telegraph Avenue, #206, Berkeley, CA 94705. All gifts are tax deductible.



Golden Gate Audubon Society, Inc.

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September 1981

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Mail for all individuals listed above should be sent to the GGAS office.

Send address changes to office promptly; Post Office does not forward *THE GULL*. Monthly meetings: second Thursday, 7:30 p.m. Joint membership - local and national \$20 per year (individual); \$25 (family); includes *AUDUBON* Magazine and *THE GULL*; to join, make checks payable to National Audubon Society and send to GGAS office to avoid delay in receiving *THE GULL*. Membership renewals should be sent directly to the National Audubon office. Subscriptions to *THE GULL* separately \$5 per year; single issues 75¢. High school and college student membership \$13.50 per year. Senior citizen individual, \$13.50, senior citizen family, \$15.50.

The Golden Gate Audubon Society, Inc. was established January 25, 1917, and became a chapter of National Audubon in 1948.

***The Gull* deadline is the first of the month for the following month.**